

ERIE PUBLIC LIBRARY  
(Federal Courthouse)  
(Baker Building)  
(Erie Federal Complex)  
3 Park Row  
Erie  
Erie County  
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-6738  
*PA-6738*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### ERIE PUBLIC LIBRARY

HABS No. PA-6738

Location: 3 Park Row, Erie, Erie County, Pennsylvania.

Significance: Erie Public Library is a Renaissance Revival structure built in 1897-1899 and designed by the architectural firm of Alden and Harlow. This type of Beaux-Arts institutional building is indicative of civic improvement efforts going on throughout the United States around the turn of the twentieth century.

Description: Erie Public Library was designed according to Beaux-Arts ideals of symmetry and formality at the end of the nineteenth century. It occupies a half city block and all four elevations are fully ornamented. The flat-roof structure is nine by five bays, with the center bays on each elevation projecting slightly to emphasize the round arch doorways at the center. The entrance on the long elevation is surrounded by a cut stone architrave with a Palladian window above with terra cotta surround.

Although only two stories, the library is given a monumental appearance by the stone foundation rising to the sill of the first floor windows, large window openings, and an elaborate terra cotta cornice and roof balustrade. The walls are golden orange Roman brick. Two-story brick pilasters with terra cotta Corinthian capitals appear at each corner, the edges of the entrance pavilions, and flanking the doorways. An elaborate one-story portico shelters the door on the short elevation at South Park Row. The portico is supported by clusters of three Ionic columns at each corner and topped with a terra cotta balustrade matching the one at the cornice. It is accessed by walking up three shallow steps. An ornate Palladian window above the portico features terra cotta wreaths, festoons, and moldings. The window openings (rectangular on the first floor and round arch on the second) have decorative terra cotta surrounds.

The library is now joined by a modern glass atrium (2003-2004) to the former Federal Courthouse (1938) and Baker Building (1947) to form the Erie Federal Complex.

History: Erie Public Library was commissioned by the Erie Public School system and built in 1897-1899. It demonstrates the Beaux-Arts Neoclassicism becoming common for institutional buildings throughout the United States. This stylistic choice offered dignified formality in appearance and a logical plan conducive to moving groups through large public spaces. The firm of Alden and Harlow designed the library, which had a

complicated program including an art gallery, library, and ladies' assembly hall. The firm also designed the 1907 extension for the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh. Several elements used at the Erie Public Library were used on a larger scale at the Carnegie Institute.

Source: Lu Donnelly, David Brumble and Franklin Toker. *Buildings of Pennsylvania: Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, forthcoming.

Historian: Lisa Pfueller Davidson, HABS Historian, 2006.

Project

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